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# **Lisa GILMAN, *My Music, My War: The Listening Habits of U.S. Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan***

**Jonathan Pieslak**

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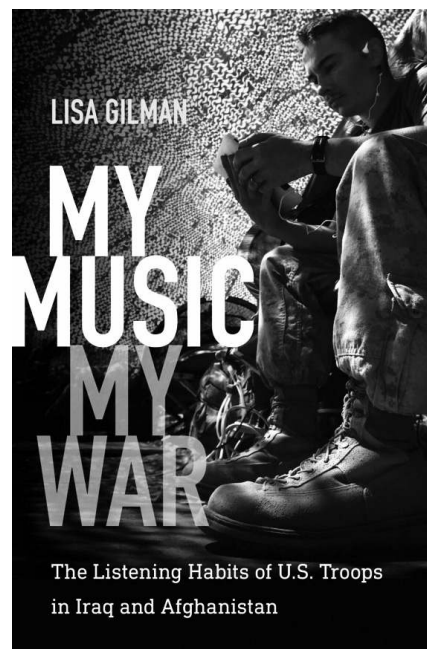
# Lisa Gilman, *My Music, My War: The Listening Habits of U.S. Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan*, Middletown (CT), Wesleyan University Press, 2016

By Jonathan Pieslak

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Lisa Gilman's *My Music, My War: The Listening Habits of U.S. Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan* is a valuable contribution to the burgeoning scholarly engagement with music's profound role in the context of war and combat experience. Through a series of personal, email, and phone interviews conducted with 34 servicemen and service-women (30 men and 4 women), she crafts a nuanced picture of how music operates in the lives of U.S. troops deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her skills as a meticulous interviewer and researcher are on display in this absorbing study, and overall, the book is a must-read for anyone interested in or teaching the topic.

The book is cast in nine chapters with numerous subheadings in each, helping unfold the content in a clear and directed manner. The first few chapters provide contextual information for the study; "setting the scene," as Gilman puts it, for an engagement



with various ways that music functions in U.S. troops' lives. In particular, she underscores how important and prevalent music was, as well as the highly divergent listening habits that were often shaped by age, rank, military-occupational strategy (job), and combat environment. Additionally, she adequately highlights the often-overlooked or underemphasized importance of technology in allowing music to resonate in troops' lives in ways that, until now, were unprecedented in the history of combat.

The next three chapters are devoted to various topics related to the deployment experiences of those she interviewed: music as a war soundtrack (chap. 4), gender and masculinity (chap. 5), and negotiating feelings, emotions, and psychological struggles (chap. 6). Chapter 7 explores how music functioned in their lives in post-conflict contexts, while chapter 8 shifts focus to music's role in the political transformation

of several men among the group she considered. The book closes with a short chapter in which Gilman reflects on dimensions of her research experience, contemplations through which we might contextualize her entire perspective on this research:

“I was especially interested in reflecting on the important role that music can play in war where troops have access to so little to enable them to cope with multiple demands. Yet ultimately, the project has been as much about personal experience narratives, very intimate and personal stories of life, war, war’s aftermath.” (188)

The book shines in chapters 5 and 7, in which Gilman makes her most insightful and original contributions to the topic. Her handling of gender and the “paradox of masculinity” in the military is impressive, and she devotes the most space of any chapter to this topic. Of special note is how she navigates thorny theoretical terrain with clarity in her writing, breaking the all-too-often academic practice of unfolding needlessly complex theory through equally impenetrable writing and explanation. She carefully navigates the reader through “doing gender,” its relationship to music and identity, power and hierarchies, and heterosexual interaction and normativity all within the context of military life. Likewise, chapter 7 is one of the book’s strengths. She goes into fine detail on music, memory, and post-combat experiences, revealing the struggles, coping, and healing that music was a pivotal part of. The reader should find these chapters illuminating.

The eighth chapter on music and political transformation was the least resounding to me. Organizationally speaking, it felt awkward to spend an entire chapter focusing on the transformative processes of political

viewpoint of a small subset of her interviewees. Moreover, the topic seemed misplaced within the framework of the book’s other focuses. The chapter described music’s involvement in supporting transformative political experiences—a chronicling of experience with music in the antiwar movement. However, the topic was ripe for engagement with music and social movement literature, something that never happened. We shifted domains into the realm of music, protest, and social movements, and were lacking an analysis that should have framed such discussions.

Notwithstanding, the book is an important, even indispensable, study that resists broad mischaracterizations about U.S. troops at war, in particular, that they can be represented through a single identity or that those who suffer from PTSD are somehow “broken” by their experiences and cannot re-assimilate into society after combat experience. Overall, it is a well-researched, clearly presented, and strongly argued work of scholarship.

## **Antoine Hennion, *The Passion for Music: A Sociology of Mediation*, Surrey (UK), Ashgate, 2015**

**By Thomas M. Kitts**

An English edition of Antoine Hennion’s *The Passion for Music* has been long overdue. A prominent sociologist at the Centre de